Privacy, Professionalism, and the Female Lawyer: Intimate Publicness in *The Good Wife*

Katja Kanzler

The legal drama – a staple of American popular culture – has evolved as one of the 'masculine' genres in the gendered landscape of television culture. A type of workplace drama focusing on professional settings historically dominated by men, it traditionally dramatizes "a world where men played the only important parts and where male bonding and inter-male conflict were dominant elements in the narrative," to adapt Kenneth MacKinnon's general observations about 'masculine' tv (69). Yet the gendering of the (traditional) legal drama goes well beyond the ubiquity of male characters: It is deeply ingrained in the figuration of the lawyer that classic instances of the genre established. Michael Epstein, in his discussion of post-World-War-II law series, including the emblematic *Perry Mason*, argues that these classic programs advanced a popular image of the lawyer as "hyper-masculine public lawyer statesman" (1213) – as an embodiment of the social order that mediates between private experiences or interests, and the principles of the polis. Crucially, the heroism of the traditional lawyer figure, his capacity to effect justice, rests on his distance from the private sphere – series like *Perry Mason* imagine him as "a public-minded individual who is uninterested in and unaffected by the private realm of women and domesticity" (1215). It is only from this position of distance, these narratives imply, that the lawyer can mediate private experiences and feelings – often sensationally performed in fictional courtrooms – in and for the sphere of law and thus ensure the proper functioning of the legal system. While the traditional legal drama thus needs the figure of the 'manly lawyer' for its representation of the law as a system that reliably effects justice,[1] it also offers affirmative narratives of (middle-class) masculinity – narratives that reiterate the role and relevance of men as guardians of the social order, and that tie their ability to act in this role to old scripts of masculinity.

What happens to this tradition in more recent legal dramas that focus on female lawyer figures?[2] How does the traditional alignment of femininity with the private

1 In a broad survey of "legally themed programs aired on network television," Naomi Mezey and Mark Niles have observed an overwhelming tendency to represent the legal system in a positive light: "With a few arguable exceptions, the images of law and legal structures depicted on television serve to reinforce the most reassuring conceptions of the relationship between law and justice and even offer comforting mythologies (attorneys and judges as heroic and capable defenders of justice, the legal system as predictably successful in punishing the culpable and vindicating the innocent and government officials as honest and hard-working public servants with the best interests of their constituents at heart)" (114-15). For the prevalence of heroic lawyer-characters on television, see also Rapping 21-47.

2 The appearance of programs centering on female lawyer-characters – arguably inaugurated by the series *Ally McBeal* – can be seen as part of what Amanda Lotz has called the "watershed of female-centered dramas that emerged in the mid 1990s" (3) in US television.

sphere impact the figuration of the lawyer and of the legal system? Or, to ask this question from a different vantage point, what particular cultural work is enabled by re-imagining the lawyer-hero as feminine? In the following, I want to use Lauren Berlant's concept of the intimate public to explore how contemporary figurations of the female lawyer re-engage the threshold of public and private – a threshold overdetermined in the classic conventions of the legal drama. My case study will be *The Good Wife*, which offers particularly fruitful material in this context. Against the backdrop of a social world in which the public and private cross-contaminate each other in multiple ways, the series constructs a female lawyer that challenges hegemonic notions of femininity as well as ideas about the operations of the law as a system of the public sphere. Consistently thinking the law along with politics and depicting both as suffused with a mediatized sensationalism that sustains hegemonic discourses, especially of gender, the series adapts the blueprint of the lawyer-hero to engage with contemporary ideas typically denoted by the terms of postfeminism and neoliberalism.[3]

Berlant's 'Intimate Public'

Lauren Berlant's conception of the "intimate public" offers a highly productive lens to grasp the privacy dynamics that underwrite, both, the discourse of postfeminism and of neoliberalism – that, in fact, mark a major point of their intersection.[4] Berlant uses the term "intimate public" to describe instances – atrophies, she would insist – of a public sphere organized around the sharing of and bonding over (certain) private experiences and (certain) states of feeling. In Berlant's account, the evolution of intimate publics in the United States is closely

3 In the words of David Harvey, neoliberalism is a set of ideas and practices that revolve around "[d]eregularion, privatization, and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision" (3), based on the assumption that "human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills" (2). Postfeminism is a more ambiguous signifier. I use it in the sense defined by Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra as "a set of assumptions, widely disseminated within popular media forms, having to do with the 'pastness' of feminism" (1). A central marker of postfeminism's complex relationship to feminism is its recontextualization of feminine empowerment from a matter of (social and economic) politics to a matter of private lifestyle choices.

4 The discourses of postfeminism and neoliberalism notably intersect in their privatization of concerns previously understood as belonging to the political public. As Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff poignantly note: "both appear to be structured by a current of individualism that has almost entirely replaced notions of the social or political, or any idea of individuals as subject to pressures, constraints or influence from outside themselves. Secondly, it is clear that the autonomous, calculating, self-regulating subject of neoliberalism bears a strong resemblance to the active, freely choosing, self-reinventing subject of postfeminism. These two parallels suggest then, that postfeminism is not simply a response to feminism but also a sensibility that is at least partly constituted through the pervasiveness of neoliberal ideas" (7).

tied to a discursive context of gender. She identifies as its historically first large-scale formation the sentimental women's culture of the 19th century, which she theorizes as a "market domain where a set of problems associated with managing femininity is expressed and worked through," in a mode of sentimentalism that "claim[s] a certain emotional generality among women" (2008: 5). While stressing its disempowering dimensions, Berlant frames this early intimate public of women's culture as a politically ambivalent phenomenon. On the one hand, she points to its counter-hegemonic potential for minority subjects, like women, who did not have access to the established public sphere of political discourse: In 19th-century women's culture, intimate publicness operated as a "survival aesthetics" for a largely disenfranchised social group (2008: xii). However, rather than fueling resistant models of femininity and interventions into structural inequalities, this intimate public ultimately enforced compliance with hegemonic gender models. For one, it locked women into a private definition of their social roles, as "default managers of the intimate" (2008: xi), thus rerouting oppositional energies from the political public as the sphere of their discussion to the private realm of feeling. Two, it very narrowly defined, in normative terms, the kinds of experiences and feelings that mark the 'true woman,' advancing notions of feminine interiority that reinforced white, middle-class, heterosexual, and, ultimately, patriarchal norms.

What thus started as a sub-culture in the 19th century, Berlant argues, morphed into a mainstream, indeed dominant public sphere in the wake of the conservative turn of the Reagan years, adapting and capitalizing on the counter-oppositional effects of its 19th century predecessor. Berlant describes this late 20th-century intimate public as a fundamentally anti-political sphere, "collapsing the political and the personal into a world of public intimacy" (1997: 1), a public that redefines both the nation and citizenship in terms of the private: "the intimate public sphere of the U.S. present tense renders citizenship as a condition of social membership produced by personal acts and values, especially acts originating in or directed toward the family sphere" (2008: 5). This redefinition of nationhood is driven by a conservative cultural politics: Berlant theorizes it as a response by historically privileged social groups to the counter-hegemonic discourses circulated by the emancipation movements of the 1960s – a response directed against "the stereotyped peoples who have appeared to change the political rules of social membership, and, with it, a desperate desire to return to an order of things deemed normal, an order of what was felt to be a general everyday intimacy that was sometimes called 'the American way of life'" (2008: 2). What makes this intimate public so problematic then is, on the one hand, the extent to which it evacuates the public sphere of the political discussions that continue to be an urgent necessity – discussions of, say, the unequal distribution of economic and social capital. On the other hand, it also normatively defines the kinds of private arrangements and states of feeling that count as the basis of citizenship, in ways that disenfranchise "the

stereotyped peoples" – "people of color, women, gay, and lesbians" (2008: 2) – from the 'intimacy' of the national community.

Berlant's notion of the intimate public thus throws into relief key dynamics of the contemporary discourses of postfeminism and neoliberalism. Highlighting how these late-20th-century phenomena build on a history of conservative cultural politics, she contours the ways in which notions of privacy have been yielded to de-authorize or diffuse challenges to the hegemonic order. In her discussion, privacy emerges as a discursive space monopolized by right-wing politics, whose phenomenal public success story – its rise from 19th-century sub-culture to late-20th-century cultural mainstream – is closely tied to the expansion of the mass media, that have both enabled the circulation of intimate publicness and that considerably owe their own thriving to it. The postfeminist, neoliberal intimate public largely manifests itself as a media culture of popular appeal that (re-)legitimates hetero-patriarchal gender norms while advancing a large-scale privatization of citizenship.

The Good Wife I: Agency and 'Public Feeling'

These dynamics deeply resonate in *The Good Wife*. Projecting a storyworld in which issues of public concern are consistently negotiated in the register of the private, this legal drama makes the private a notably ambiguous touchstone for its protagonist's story. In the series, intimate publicness figures as a dual challenge for lawyer-hero Alicia Florrick[5]: On the one hand, it constitutes a site of vulnerability that threatens to reduce the female lawyer to her domestic role as 'good' wife and mother. On the other hand, legal professionalism for Alicia recurrently entails a confrontation with the hegemonic norms that govern which private experiences and feelings easily circulate in public and which do not. The series ties both of these challenges to the crossroads of two discursive contexts of intimate publicity: a mediatized sensationalism that saturates the main arenas of publicness depicted by the series, the law and politics; and old gender discourses that prove remarkably undead in the program's 21st-century setting. These contexts of 'public feeling' – mutually implicated in a variety of ways – circumscribe the protagonist at the beginning of the series, setting off a plot that is driven by Alicia's efforts to gain control over the intimate public in which she finds herself and practices law. The series's overarching plotline concerning its title character can thus be thought of as a struggle for agency in the public sphere, a struggle that critically reflects on the ideology of intimate publicness, highlighting both the colonization of public

5 Alicia Florrick is the main character but not the only female lawyer-hero in the series. In fact, *The Good Wife* develops several storylines that dramatize the significance of women's networks in the professional world it projects. Their dramatization deserves to be discussed in a separate paper.

discussion and action by private issues, and the normative privileging of some private arrangements and states of feeling over others.

The teaser from *The Good Wife*'s pilot sets the stage for this narrative arc ("Pilot"). It is a scene that the series continues to invoke, literally by replaying its imagery – e.g., in its first-season title-card – and, more lastingly, through its title, whose (ambiguous) meaning is inextricably tied to this opening scene. The scene begins with a close-up on a man and a woman walking down a corridor, focusing not on their faces but on the hands they hold in what, by default, appears as affectionate familiarity. A door opens and the two enter a room full of journalists, who bustle into action. The man steps to the microphones while the woman takes her place beside him. It is in this moment that the camera reveals the two faces, in a shot that has the man – Peter Florrick – focalized in the foreground and the woman – Alicia Florrick – notably blurry in the back. Peter begins to read a prepared speech in which he announces his resignation as state's attorney and responds to charges of corruption and marital infidelity. His speech is both expertly written and professionally performed – it is an attack of Peter's political opponent, a counter-charge of corruption and planting false evidence. While Peter thus denies the charge of having abused his office, he does confess to marital infidelity – a charge rendered substantial by brief scenes showing Peter in bed with another woman that are intercut with the representation of the press conference. Yet this confession only corroborates the image of sincerity and, ultimately, integrity that the speech projects of Peter, a confession designed as a public performance of repentance in which Alicia's presence plays a key role.

Alicia remains silent throughout the entire scene. Initially, she appears only in the margins of the frame, sometimes barely visible. The scene correlates its own framing there with the work of the many cameras at the press conference, closing up on several intradiegetic screens that mark Peter's statement as a media event. But eventually, the scene zooms in on Alicia – her image getting increasingly grainy as the zoom progresses – and reveals a previously invisible agitation on her face. And while the cause and object of this agitation do not get verbalized, a final wordless interaction between the two characters reflects on Alicia's turmoil: Her gaze is arrested by a piece of lint on Peter's suit, she first hesitates and then moves her hand very slowly as if to remove it. When her hand is halfway up, Peter takes it and pulls her out of the room, the camera again zooming on their locked hands. Outside, she immediately lets go of her husband's hand, who takes a moment to notice, and upon his question whether she is alright, slaps him in the face. Walking away from him, she prepares to leave the backstage area on her own, facing a world – half visible through a glass door in the background – full of cameras waiting to commodify her as the-betrayed-wife.

This opening scene provides the backstory for the professional position as a lawyer that the protagonist would inhabit in the series, establishing her past life as

the wife of a fast-rising politician and its humiliating end, brought about by her husband's public infidelity, which turns her into an unwitting celebrity; and her return to a job she had quit many years ago, a return motivated by a mixture of necessity and self-determination. In many ways, then, the pilot's teaser marks the point of departure for Alicia's (ongoing) development in the course of the series. This point of departure is especially characterized by the protagonist's silence and lack of agency. Her silence is set off by Peter's eloquence in the opening scene, who expertly yields the language of intimate publicity and surfs the currents of media attention that sustain it. His confession to marital infidelity is well calculated to safeguard his professional reputation and to work toward returning to his position, an effort in which he will have succeeded by the end of the second season, and which he will top by climbing the political ladder even further in the seasons to come. Alicia appears as a silent prop in Peter's performance in the pilot's teaser, she is not in any way an agent in this scene of intimate publicity controlled by a character who simultaneously inhabits the hegemonic positions of husband, lawyer, and politician.

Alicia's lack of agency will be a recurrent theme in the series, especially in its first seasons: the public revelation of her private life and offers of sympathetic bonding over the experience are things that happen **to** Alicia, threatening to undercut her efforts to reinvent herself as a different kind of person than the woman framed as 'good wife' by a public confession of infidelity. And as much as the protagonist's point of departure is thus marked by a sense of exposure to forces beyond her control, the series does not depict her as a powerless victim. Beginning in the moment when Alicia slaps and walks away from her husband in the pilot episode,[6] the series designs its protagonist's development as a learning curve in which she confronts the intimate public through which she moves, negotiating spaces of agency and self-determination. Such negotiations already unfold in the episode following the pilot, at a point in the series's narrative chronology where Alicia's re-entry into the professional world is still heavily overshadowed by her celebrity status as cheated wife. The case that stands at the episode's center revolves around rape – a highly signifying issue in the tableau of intimate publicity sketched by the series's pilot: On the one hand, a rape trial invokes a feminist politics concerning privacy, an insistence that coerced sexuality is a matter of public concern. Rape thus metonymically stands for the interventions into notions of privacy that have been initiated by feminist and other subaltern movements, and which the hegemonic intimate public discussed by Berlant specifically seeks to

6 The series does not have Alicia fully and finitely turn her back to Peter but rather scripts a complex development for their relationship. On the one hand, it has Alicia confront her conflicted feelings for her husband (complicated by her attraction to a colleague). On the other hand, it has her come to terms with the publicity of their marriage – the extent to which it benefits not only Peter's career but also, and increasingly, her own.

redress. On the other hand, the narrative constellation in the episode also conjures up the recent scandal around Alicia's private life and her emotional involvement in it: The case involves a stripper who claims to have been raped by one of the town's rich and famous, asking Alicia's law firm to represent her in a civil trial ("Stripped").

Alicia's work on this case is one of confrontation with the privacy dynamics that surround it. First of all, the episode's plot does not tie Alicia's assignment to the case to her professional competencies – she is at the bottom of the law firm's hierarchy, her job is to do the scutwork for the high billing lawyers – but to her public notoriety for her husband's scandal. The client specifically asks for Alicia to be on the case and, upon Alicia's question why, she remarks: "I saw you on tv. I thought you'd understand what it's like to be misunderstood." Similarly, the opposing party's lawyer immediately 'recognizes' Alicia and, in a fake gesture of sympathy, speaks to her alleged experience and state of feeling: "Mrs. Florrick, what would you say to someone bringing unsubstantiated sexual charges against a public figure just in order to gain an advantage?" The protagonist's private persona, encoded and circulated in the media coverage of her husband's resignation, overshadows and threatens to obliterate her professional presence.

To contest this obliteration and affirm a professional self-definition, Alicia needs to confront the offers of intimacy by which client and opposing lawyer framed her – offers that specifically invoke the complex politics of privacy in this case. The lawyer's appeal is a rather transparent attempt to enlist Alicia's alleged feelings in a narrative that de-legitimizes the client's charges of rape. It takes Alicia only a slight moment to refuse his phony offer of sympathetic bonding by a reply that both affirms the professional nature of her presence and challenges the rape mythology that tacitly resonates in his question: "You want to know what I would say? I would […] I would say you're trying to change the subject from rape."[7] In the course of the episode's plot, Alicia and her colleagues will work to keep the rape on the agenda, against considerable obstacles that take their most potent form in a very lucrative settlement offer that comes with a confidentiality clause – a prohibition to make the rape public. The justice that is served by the episode's closure is entirely focused on the making public of the rape as a crime: Alicia's firm loses the civil trial but manages to stir up an initially hesitant state's attorney to press criminal charges.

The client's address to Alicia as a fellow "misunderstood" woman proves more elusive – how is the protagonist misunderstood in the spectacle of her husband's

7 'Rape myths' is a term of feminist scholarship to denote "prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, or rapists. Rape myths have the effect of denying that many instances involving coercive sex are actually rapes" (Burt 129). Martha Burt's article develops a typology of the rape myths that most pervasively circulate in contemporary culture, and she maps the effects that they have, e.g. on rape trials.

scandal, and by whom? – making it more difficult to navigate. This is additionally complicated by Alicia's growing suspicion that Peter might have patronized the woman's services which, as the client admits, had used to include the services of a sex worker. The woman's mode of address thus cuts to the emotional residue of Alicia's private experiences and their public exposure – feelings of hurt, humiliation, and anger. It takes the protagonist visible effort to extricate herself from these feelings, to resist their pull as forces that define her self and threaten to distract her, too, from the subject of rape. The teleology of justice that resonates in the episode's plot marks this difficult choice of a professional subjectivity as unambiguously 'right' – Alicia's suspicions about Peter's patronage of the woman's sexual services turn out to be unfounded.

This episode is exemplary for the ways in which the series focuses on its protagonist's struggle for agency in the intimate public projected in the storyworld, her effort to emancipate herself from the passivity dramatized in the pilot. And while such early narratives in the series's chronology place much emphasis on Alicia's refusal to allow publicly circulating images and narratives of her private life to define herself, as the series progresses, it increasingly confronts her with the realization that intimate publicness is an actuality in her social environment – that it will not go away but has to be navigated. She does so with increasing competence – accepting, e.g., that she owes many job opportunities to her celebrity status, or negotiating very clearly with her husband's advisor which areas of her private life are available for public circulation and in which ways.[8] This line of the protagonist's development – far from linear, and with many ethical complications – continues to be a major thread in the narrative of the series, even as it unfolds many other themes in the course of its six seasons to date.

The Good Wife II: The Mediality of Intimate Publicity

An episode from the show's sixth season to which I will turn in a moment, "Oppo Research," both highlights the long way that Alicia will have come by this point in the series's chronology, and it focalizes another motif introduced in the pilot and running through the entire series: the mass-mediality of the intimate public projected in *The Good Wife*. The pilot's teaser, as addressed above, obviously develops this motif through its setting – a press conference – and through a mise-en-scene that is ripe with moments of medial (self-)reflexivity,

8 The management of Alicia's public persona especially becomes an issue from the second season onward, as her husband again campaigns for the office of state's attorney and later for that of governor. One aspect of her private life whose public circulation the protagonist repeatedly struggles to control are her religious beliefs: Both Alicia's atheism and her conviction that it is a private matter are a recurrent subject of debate with Peter's campaign manager. See, e.g., the fourth-season episode "The Seven Day Rule."

highlighting the many intradiegetic cameras and screens present at the setting. It thus insistently frames the depicted scene of intimate publicity as a media spectacle, a spectacle fully bound to the apparatus of the mass media and its logic. The staging of Peter's statement is palpably governed by conventions tied to this apparatus, conventions enforced by the intradiegetic agents of the media and strategically used by Peter and his advisors: the intradiegetic cameras in close up on Peter – a shot conventionalized as encoding an 'intimate' penetration into a character's interior;[9] Alicia's positioning in the background or the margins of the frame, visible as a presence but not focalized as a subject in her own right; the scrolling newstickers and voice-overs by commentators that headline the sex story while sidelining, if not fully ignoring, the political story; and the well-worn phrases of public atonement in Peter's speech ("With the love of god […]"). The series here and elsewhere insists that it is such media-bound conventions that **produce** the spectacle of intimate publicity, that lend scenes of public feeling the gravitational pull of the spectacular which absorbs public attention. Crucially, it also pinpoints these conventions as carriers of hegemonic ideology, as operating on the basis of conservative ideas about gender roles and family values, which are not merely advertised in the process but installed as the "*horizon*[s] of political interest" (Berlant 1997: 262; emphasis in the original).

Especially against this backdrop of the intimate public's media-bound center-staging of privacy, the sixth-season episode "Oppo Research" is highly interesting, engaging in a close intertextual dialogue with the pilot on several levels. It marks a point in the narrative where, after many twists and turns in her private as well as professional life, Alicia decides to run for state's attorney. The episode revolves around a meeting between Alicia and her advisors. For the protagonist, the meeting is about her decision whether or not to run for political office – the episode emphasizes her nervousness by showing her over-ambitiously cleaning the house and preparing snacks for the meeting, opening the door to one of her advisors with an apron over her business suit. For her advisors, the meeting is about the management of Alicia's public image that, they insist, needs to be in place before anything else. The meeting thus confronts Alicia with the ubiquity of intimate publicness from a different angle – one in which she is not an accessory to political power but one of its brokers; one in which she needs to come to terms with a social environment in which claims to power are negotiated in the currency of (normative) privacy.

The advisors put before the protagonist two potential images that could feasibly be spun from the 'material' of her private life. One is the desirable image, to be advertised in her prospective campaign, the image that, polling shows, could get her elected: It is the image, tellingly dubbed a 'brand' by one of the advisors, of

9 See, e.g., John Fiske's discussion of the use of close-ups in traditions of the soap opera (183-84; also 33).

"Saint Alicia": "[…] you stood by your husband. [T]hat image of you beside him is still bumping around the internet. You look better now. People like that. You survived, you prospered. You didn't divorce." The other image – or, rather, set of images – are the result of 'opposition research' that the advisors did, research into Alicia's private life that would have to be expected of her opponents. Their findings include conspicuous instances of private behavior marked as non-normative by right-wing politics – instances whose excessive sensationalism borders on caricature: her mother spanking a stranger's child in public; her teenage son impregnating his underage Muslim girlfriend and accompanying her to an abortion; her gay brother having an affair "with a married Palestinian man who also does barebacked gay porn."

'Saint Alicia' is, of course, an image fully thriving on the logic of the intimate public: a woman qualified for political office because she heroically overcame a private crisis and stayed true to family values. The advisors – who could be thought of as agents of intimate publicness here – notably think through this image in terms of its media-resonance, of how it evokes the protagonist's 'branding' media-moment – standing beside her husband when he confessed to marital infidelity –, and of how it weaves this visual image into a narrative of postfeminist heroism. A comment by one of the advisors concerning the dramaturgy of Alicia's prospective announcement of candidacy additionally reflects on how they orient their image-management toward the media's logic: "They'll show the old shot of you standing by Peter in disgrace. Then this new shot of Peter standing by you in triumph." Conversely, the findings of their opposition research become a source of concern because the private acts that stand behind them have left a media residue – files in the abortion clinic, a surveillance video in the shopping mall where Alicia's mother spanked the child. Her brother's affair has not generated any media evidence, but, even more explosively, "the story could get pinned to any visual, pixilated gay porn," as one of the advisors notes. In the storyworld's intimate public, these media-snippets figure both as spectacular attractions and as potential narratemes in a different story of Alicia's private character, one that would violate conservative norms of private life. It is this combination of probable media-circulation and oppositional narratibility that calls for containment in the advisors' logic.

Through the character of Alicia and in its own narrative discourse, the episode now raises the question how to respond to this normative weight of the intimate public. The response it maps is neither refusal nor open resistance – responses that would clearly cost the protagonist her bid to power – but irony, whose potentials and limitations in grappling with the intimate public's normativity are sounded out in the course of the episode. Irony is explicitly addressed in Alicia's reaction to her branding as 'Saint Alicia' – the following exchange ensues when her advisor pitches the idea:

Alicia: "I wish you would say ['Saint Alicia'] with at least a hint of irony."

Eli: "No. Irony is dead now, you're campaigning. JFK could be funny, you can't. There's too many bloggers out there quoting every ironic comment as truth."

Alicia: "Okay. [Writing down on her notepad with mock seriousness:] 'Stop joking.'"

And, to some extent, this is what Alicia does in the remainder of the episode's plot – she sincerely commits to disciplining her son, mother, and brother, and to thus manage the unruly potential of their non-normative private lives. Rather than fully renouncing irony, she relegates it to areas of her private life safely insulated from public exposure. Irony, then, becomes the matter of a subversive counter-privacythat provides relief and intimate moments of resistance. While such a practice of irony certainly has its productive potentials, it ultimately remains locked within the logic of neoliberalism – it, too, reroutes the articulation of political dissent away from the public sphere to the realm of the private.

While the episode, on this level, contours the problematics of irony, it dramatizes its potentials on another – on the level of its own storytelling which, in contrast to the protagonist's concealment of irony, emphatically adopts and exhibits it. This self-conscious choice of irony is not only significant because the episode so clearly ties it to a subversion of conservative cultural politics, but also because the series's prior storytelling, always strongly leaning toward the non-ironic, had been partly complicit with the logic of the intimate public. This complicity, for example, immediately registered in the pilot's teaser when the scene's own discourse aligned itself with the work of the media present at the press conference. Throughout, the series had traced its protagonist's life in the professional sphere to her private life, and – as a television drama informed by the conventions of melodrama – it had 'publicized' this privacy and savored its sensationalism. The series, then, had used the fictional publicity of its own storytelling in ways that considerably overlapped with the operations of the intimate public. Against this background, irony does emerge as potent means, a strategy that unfolds its potential in medial self-reflection, destabilizing the logic of intimate publicness entailed in the conventions of television culture and resonating in the series's storytelling.

"Oppo Research" is suffused with irony, from the hyperbole in the unearthed secrets of Alicia's family, to the playful montage of Alicia's strategy meeting with her daughter's Christian choir practice – the soundbites from their hymns offering ironic commentary on the subject of Alicia's discussion. But the context in which the episode most fully develops its ironic stance is a commentary on the

protagonist's image and image-making that is highly self-reflexive. As noted above, the episode's plot revolves around image-management, juxtaposing and deliberating two images of Alicia that could emerge in the storyworld. The episode now counters these two intradiegetic images – Saint Alicia and working-mother Alicia with a dysfunctional family – with a third image, privileged by the episode's discourse as more pertinent than either of the other two: the image of 'Badass Alicia.' "Oppo Research" develops this image, first of all, by focusing on how the protagonist confronts and deals with the demands that attend claims to political power and the job of a politician. Most of its plot details how, following her advisors' recommendations, she conducts unpleasant conversations with her family and how she faces up to her own emotional responses to the exposed moments of their privacy, preparing herself for a career step after which she might be routinely confronted with such exposures. In other words, this imaging foregrounds the protagonist's professionalism rather than the question whether or not her private life conforms with conservative 'family values.' It also dramatizes her in actions that complicate the 'saintly' image of Alicia that the series itself had cultivated, challenging her characterization as a person exclusively driven by her ethical convictions.[10]

This narrative of Alicia is correlated with snippets of an intradiegetic television program that characters watch, on and off, throughout the episode: a talk-show that discusses a (fictional) tv series, called *Darkness at Noon*.[11] The series along with the talk-show advance a narrative all too familiar from contemporary contexts of 'Quality TV.'[12] The first snippet we get to see of *Darkness at Noon*, as Alicia watches it while waiting for her advisors, shows a man shooting another one, ventilating 'philosophical' thoughts: "This is how the world ends: Someone begs, and someone stands over him with a gun." The pundits in the intradiegetic talk-show are full of praise for these scenes, and "badass" is their term-of-choice to designate the 'quality' they see in the series. Their discussion culminates in the question who – in this series full of "badass stuff" and "with so many badasses in them" – is the 'most badass' character. The rhetorical question: "isn't the whole point that the badass is the guy with the gun?" resolves their discussion.

10 This complication, e.g., emerges in the way she disciplines her son, commanding him to lie about his girlfriend's abortion. It is further amplified in the plotline involving a character named Lemond Bishop which I did not detail above – Bishop is one of Alicia's long-term clients, whose involvement in organized crime has been a recurrent source of ethical conflict for the protagonist. In "Oppo Research," Bishop is revealed as a major (and illegal) donor for Alicia's election campaign.

11 For a discussion of how *The Good Wife* has used this fictional intradiegetic tv series across several episodes, see Adams.

12 Several scholars have commented on the gender dynamics of television's 'quality'-discourse. For a succinct discussion of the scholarship, see Imre.

In an ironic mise-en-abyme, these scenes throw into relief the protagonist's (complicated) heroism while self-consciously situating this imaging of Alicia in a television culture that tends to imagine (anti-)heroism as masculine. They provide a backdrop against which Alicia's actions in the episode appear in a different light – a markedly new light because the intradiegetic series so strongly relies on masculine scripts. The talk-show discussion ironically accentuates the gender codes that suffuse *Darkness at Noon* and its reception: "the badass is the guy with the gun" captures contemporary culture's penchant for a particular type of masculine antihero,[13] whose imaging is closely tied to the aesthetics of 'Quality TV.' The mise-en-abyme, then, frames Alicia's confrontation of the intimate public as an (anti-)heroic negotiation of power, a project of self-making in an arena where the currency of power may not be as easily legible as masculine as the paradigmatic gun, but where it is equally shaped by existing structures of privilege. Simultaneously, the mise-en-abyme reflects on the media and its conventions, within which such narratives of heroism are inevitably constructed and deciphered. Directing attention to its own nature as a television series, *The Good Wife* playfully reflects on the gender discourses that are advertised in television's hero narratives and their implication in a larger cultural politics. The episode thus adds yet another dimension to its construction of Alicia Florrick as a female lawyer-hero, whose characterization self-consciously speaks to current (re-)negotiations of femininity.

Conclusion

The Good Wife, in its imagination of a female lawyer-hero, revisits the genre-coded threshold between public and private in ways that poignantly engage with contemporary culture. Rather than the clear boundary imagined in the legal drama's classic iterations, it projects a storyworld in which private and public collapse in ways that distinctly resonate with Lauren Berlant's notion of the intimate public and its right-wing cultural politics. And rather than defining the lawyer's heroism as one of mediation between the realms of the private and the public, in the service of a justice that is conceived as absolute, *The Good Wife* casts its protagonist as heroic in her efforts to confront the intimate publicness that permeates her social environment and to carve out spaces of legal professionalism. The horizon for this professionalism is not, as in the classic series, an absolute notion of justice, but justice complicated by the power games of politics – games in which the protagonist herself is deeply implicated through her quest of self-making. Alicia Florrick's heroism is thus more complex and conflicted than that of

13 The contemporary currency of the masculine antihero has also be read as the symptom of a neoliberal culture. See, e.g., Malcolm Harris's exploration of the recent wave of 'entrepreneurial' antiheroes who take over or fill in where public institutions are dramatized as deficient, or Michele Byers's discussion of *Dexter*.

the classic lawyer-hero, and it is more self-consciously developed by a series that exhibits a clear awareness of its own hero-making and the medial conventions within which this takes place. These complications of the genre's classic hero-figure, along with the social world projected in the series, strongly signify on contemporary culture, particularly on its mobilizations of privacy to deflect opposition against the existing distribution of privilege, especially but not only in terms of gender. While *The Good Wife* does not – maybe cannot – fully renounce intimate publicity and steer clear of its cultural reach, it does throw into relief major dynamics of its ideology.

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